The Orphan and the Pauper by BigBadLittleRed

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Summary:

After a devastating earthquake during a trip to India, Steve Harrington is left with two severely broken legs and no parents. He is sent to the only relative he has left, his uncle Theodore, to live with his family in Yorkshire. There, he meets his cousins Michael and Nancy, along with a servant boy named Will, who tells him of a mysterious brother of his that has a limp and can talk to animals.

The Orphan and the Pauper

August 21st, 1910

The air in Yorkshire is much different from that of India, the skies are grayer, but it seems like they stretch much farther with the open fields they pass through. The roads aren't paved, only identifiable from wheel ruts and a lack of grass. The moors were in a fog, a small drizzle keeping everything outside damp.

Steve felt in a haze alike the moors themselves as the carriage moved steadily, his only companion in the cabin is the woman who apparently works for his uncle. Constance Frazier was her name, with blonde hair slowly graying and piercing blue eyes. She had been curt and short with him since he had arrived at the port, as stiff as her black shroud of a dress.

He didn't mind her behavior all that much, his parents hadn't treated him much differently from his birth until their death. He had been raised by servants, only shown affection by those who were paid to do it. He can only recall a few times his mother ever told him she loved him, he doesn't remember his father ever saying it.

Yet their loss was a hole in his chest, the only family he had, yanked out from under his feet. To add insult upon injury (literally and figuratively), he had been gravely injured in the earthquake that had taken their lives. He had been told that he was lucky to be alive, having been found under mounds of rubble and narrowly saved by a certain positioning of a tipped over dresser in his room.

He hadn't felt so lucky laying in the dark, struggling to breathe

against the dust with his entire lower body pinned under a piece of concrete ceiling. He dreamt about it sometimes, about the darkness, his breaths echoing in the small chamber as he weakly sobbed for help. He didn't know he was capable of being afraid like that, toes at death's doormat and slamming the knocker helplessly.

If it weren't for his father's brother, Theodore, he's not sure where he'd be. When he turned sixteen he had felt so confident and sure of himself. Who could have guessed that only a few months later it would all be taken from him?

"We're here." Frazier says needlessly as the cart comes to a stop, she hops out without another word. He sits in his seat, waiting quietly, and after a moment he thinks he's been left without a care.

Then, the driver opens the door with a small smile. He pulls Steve's chair up to the edge of the carriage, and Steve takes in a deep breath, sighing out as he examines the long drop to his destination. However, the driver doesn't seem fazed, he steps aside, and a large man appears in front of the doorway, startling Steve slightly.

"Scott told me you require some assistance." He says, propping his hands on his hips.

He looks to be a commoner, dressed in an old ratty long sleeve and muddy pants, with a newsy cap atop his head. His accent is strangely not English, sounds like an American actually, which Steve finds interesting. He himself was born in Indiana, so it feels like meeting someone familiar.

“Yes.” He nods his head, the man nods his head and reaches into the carriage, lifting Steve up and out with ease, setting him in the chair. His metal braces rattle as he’s positioned, noisy as ever.

“Who are you?” He asks as he gets himself situated, using his hands to adjust his stiff legs.

“James Hopper, groundskeeper, but I do whatever Ms. Frazier requires.” He says, although he sounds a little unhappy at admitting this as he rolls Steve up to the front steps. Another man comes racing out of the house, looking a little more put together, and helps Hopper lift the chair up the stairs to the front door.

“There you go, sir.” The man says with a nod, Steve nods his head and after the wheels of his chair are wiped mud-free, he wheels himself through the large front doors.

The estate is huge, far bigger than Steve’s had been in India, and that was saying something. Frazier appears once more, Steve glances at her for a moment before continuing his observations. He feels rather pissed off when she walks up behind him and starts pushing his chair of her own accord, as many people often did so.

“You’ll stay upstairs, where the bedrooms are.” She tells him firmly, he sighs as his wheel chair is again carried upstairs by two male servants. James Hopper is nowhere to be seen, and he wishes he was because he wanted to ask him where he was from.

“What if I want to go outside?” He asks, craning his head to watch her walk up behind them.

“I doubt that’s a good idea, your chair could get stuck.” She says with a wave of her hand, dropping it onto the polished banister.

“I don’t believe it’s your decision.” He responds, short-fused already. How dare the help talk to him in this way, like he was some sort of invalid.

“I’m in charge here, I watch the children and I keep everything running smooth.” She tells him without a hint of uncertainty.

“Right.” He rolls his eyes as he turns his head, they reach the top of the stairs and Steve smacks at the servant that tries to take hold of the handles on the back of his chair. “I can do it myself.” He snaps.

“Follow me, Steven.” Frazier walks past him, he follows her, glancing at the decorations as he passes. The whole place seemed dark and dreary, like the world outside, maybe that was just England.

She stops at a room, unlocks the door and pushes it open. When she steps inside, Steve pushes his chair past the threshold and finds himself in a large bedroom. The bed is raised up rather high, and he’s already thinking about how he’s supposed to get into it at night by himself.

“Bed’s too high.” He says immediately, turning his head to look at the woman.

“You’ll have servants to help you with that.” She tells him, he wants to protest but he’s tired of this woman’s presence. “Your meals will be brought to you, and don’t go snooping around.” She turns and heads out of the room, Steve wheels himself over to the window. It’s too high for him to see anything but the sky, he leans back and sighs.

“Welcome home.” He mutters to himself.

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He sits in his chair for hours, until his back and bottom start to hurt from the constant position. Steve decides that he’s just going to have to figure out how to get on his bed himself, and wheels himself over. He locks his chair in place, so it doesn’t slip out from under him. He reaches up and grabs the pole of the footboard, then fists his other hand into the sheets.

“Come on…” He murmurs under his breath, tugging himself to the edge of his seat.

He reaffirms his grip, then pulls hard. He manages to get his face and shoulders on the mattress, scrabbling to get his upper arm hooked on the footboard. His feet are limp and twisted on the floor beneath him, and he almost immediately starts to slide, taking the sheet with him.

“No!” He topples sideways off of his chair and onto the floor, his hip catching the handle of his chair and sending it onto its side with a muted thud as his metal braces clatter against each other and the ground. The impact hurts, his legs flaring up with pain, the only thing that had him hopeful of one day recovering.

“Damn.” He lays on his back, tired, sore, and disappointed.

“Are you all right?” He lifts his head up, finding a young boy peering around the edge of the bed warily.

“Yes.” He drops his head back down, sighing.

“Should I get someone, sir?” He asks, stepping closer and grabbing the wheelchair. “I can help.” He says with a nod.

“Are you one of my uncle’s children?” He asks, lifting himself up on his elbows. The boy grunts as he hefts the large chair upright, an impressive feat for such a little boy.

“No, I work here, sir.” He says, fidgeting as he stands on the opposite side of the chair. “My name’s William.”

“Right, then.” Steve grabs at the bed frame, tugging himself into a sitting position. His legs were still bent in the position his braces demanded them to, which made them far more in the way than he’d like.

“Polio?” He says, Steve scowls at him from his place on the floor, unsure as to what he was talking about.

“What?” He demands snappishly, the boy shrugs.

“I was asking if you had polio, sir.” He offers meekly. “My brother had it when he was younger, he’s crippled now, although not in a chair.” He rambles quietly.

“Shut up.” He shakes his head, managing to maneuver himself into sitting with his legs to the side. It hurts his knees a bit, the frail and still healing bones protesting.

“Sorry.” He approaches the chair as Steve grabs onto the handle. “I could help.” He offers again, Steve waves him off.

“I can do it.” He snaps, embarrassed and far too proud to receive help from such a young boy.

He pulls himself up, grabbing onto the back of the seat and pausing with his hip digging into the seat and his legs tangled in the footrests. Steve sits there for a moment, breathing heavily and resting his forehead on the back of the seat. William had yet to move but wasn’t offering any other comments now.

“All right, come around and give me your arm.” He instructs, the boy scrambles to comply. He holds out his arm and Steve uses it to maneuver himself around, letting go once he’s properly in place. He leans over to adjust his legs, making sure the braces were still fitted properly.

“What were you trying to do?” William questions, looking to the bed, which had its sheets rumpled.

“I can’t sit in the chair forever.” He says angrily, William frowns and looks to the bed.

“I can help.” He says, and Steve is both amused and annoyed by the repeated statement. He drops his face into his hand, chuckling wryly. “Or I can get someone else.” He shuffles his boots, which Steve had noted were rather dingy.

“I’m fine.” Steve assures, the boy hesitates, grimacing.

“W-Well you know, I’m supposed to…” He steeples his fingers nervously. “Lady Frazier told me to bring you anything you wanted and assist you.” He explains.

“That old crone.” He scowls, William makes a face, but his lips twitch slightly as if he were fighting off a smile. “What the hell am I supposed to do in this room? Can’t even see out the damn windows.” He waves a hand towards said windows, William follows his gaze.

“What do you normally do?” The boy questions, and Steve pauses, unsure. He didn’t do much at all actually, mostly just sat in place. But at least he had windows in the hospital!

“I don’t know.” He grumbles, William kicks off his shoes. “What are you doing?” He asks as the boy hauls himself onto the bed, sitting

down on the edge and facing the older. One of his socks has a hole at the toe, the pale appendage sticking out.

“Helping you onto the bed!” William holds out his arms, leaning forward as he does so.

“You’re strange, boy.” He shakes his head with a sigh, but it only seems to make William smile brightly.

“I know.” He nods, Steve scoots himself forward to the edge of his seat again.

“Move back.” He instructs, the boy does so, kneeling in the middle of the mattress. “When I pull myself up, take my arm and help me get halfway up.” He tells him, the boy nods seriously.

“Sure.” He agrees, Steve shakes his head.

“Right, you ready?” He asks, the boy nods his head, sitting up off his knees. “All right.” He grabs for the pole again, then the sheets, and pulls hard.

His chest hits the edge of the mattress, then William is there grabbing one arm and tucking his own under the one Steve was using to grip the pole. Steve wraps his arm around William’s waist, the boy pulls and falls back against the mattress, Steve partially atop him. They both sit there for a moment, breathing heavily. Steve’s legs are hurting from their position, bent in the air and unable to straighten

properly.

Steve pulls himself off of William, crawling towards the head of the bed with his arms and then turning onto his side. It's a relief to not be sitting, laying on his side facing the window, which he can see out a little better. William sits up, slipping off the bed and gaining Steve's attention.

"Where are you going?" He asks, the boy turns his head.

"Do you need something, sir?" He questions in return, Steve frowns. For a moment he thinks about asking him to stay, then decides that he doesn't need the company of a child.

"A glass of water." He says with a nod, William smiles.

"Right away!" He turns and heads out the room, leaving Steve to watch dew and mist stain the glass of the window from outside.

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A knock comes at his door hours later, he sighs and rubs his eyes, having been dozing as the sun set along the moors. Steve pulls himself into a sitting position as someone enters the room, finding a girl standing at the foot of the bed. He scowls at the sight of her, about to yell at her and say that he doesn't want another servant in here, when he notes that her clothes don't seem to be that of a servant.

“You must be Steven.” She says, leaning against the footboard casually.

“Steve.” He corrects quietly, scowling even harder when the girl stares at his leg braces. “What do you want?” He snaps.

“Someone has poor manners.” She walks around the side of the bed dragging her fingertips along his chair before sitting down in it, putting her feet in the rests.

“I could say the same about you.” He tries to sit up further, but the pain from his earlier fall flares up, he grunts as he drops back onto his pillow.

“I’m Nancy, your cousin.” She says, Steve stares at the ceiling tiredly.

“How unfortunate.” He grumbles, the girl snorts, an unattractive sound in his opinion.

“They say your parents died in an earthquake.” He looks up when the girl hops onto the bed.

“What do you want?” He demands, the girl crawls up the bed to sit next to him.

“I’m bored.” She shrugs, Steve chuckles darkly.

“Try being crippled.” He mutters.

“Did you have polio?” She questions, Steve throws his hands over his face.

“No!” He snarls, smacking the girl’s hand when she tries to touch one of the metal braces. “I got trapped under rubble, shattered my legs. Are you happy? Will you leave now?” He demands.

“You’re rude.” She says, then slips off the bed. “I’ll come back later when you aren’t so sour.” Nancy saunters out of the room, leaving Steve alone once more.

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William returns the next morning with breakfast. Steve eats as the boy sits on the windowsill up high, having used the molding on the floor to heft himself up there. He reaches up for the clasp on the window, then turns his head to Steve.

“Do you want the window open?” He asks, Steve shrugs.

“Close it before you leave.” He says, the boy nods and pushes the window open a little. The cool air is refreshing, he has to admit, and the sound of birds outside is a nice relief from the quiet.

“You met Nancy, right?” William questions curiously. Steve nods as he eats another spoonful of porridge, it was warm and not half bad.

“She tell you that?” He asks in reply, glancing up at the boy.

“No, Mike did.” He says, then his eyes widen. “I mean, Michael.” He says formally, Steve smirks.

“Who’s that?” He inquires.

“Nancy’s younger brother.” He admits, Steve nods his head and sips at his milk.

“Are you friends?” Steve finds himself asking, the first real conversation he’s had since William had left the day before. He had stopped in to drop off dinner that evening, but couldn’t stay, he was apparently due home.

“We’re not really supposed to be.” He says, looking over at the door.

“The warden say that?” Steve murmurs, William looks at him, puzzled. “Frazier.” He says as clarification, William smiles.

“Yes, Lady Frazier says I’m not supposed to be playing, I’m supposed to be working.” He says, then turns to look out the window again.

“Well, if you and Mike want to play when you aren’t busy, come to my room. I’ll say that I wanted entertainment.” He explains, William’s head snaps to face him, he drops off the sill and onto the floor.

“Really?” He asks with a smile, approaching the table.

“Sure, I need the company in this cell.” He scoffs, William turns in a circle as he steps away from the table.

“It’s a nice room.” He counters, Steve shrugs despite the fact that William wasn’t really looking. “My brother and I share a bed, in a room with our mother.” He explains, turning as he places a hand on the footboard pole on the bed.

“Tell me about your family, then. You said your brother had polio?” He asks, finishing off his breakfast and pushing his chair back away from the table.

“A few years ago, yes.” William approaches, sinking down onto the floor in front of him. “Mother works downstairs in the kitchen, but nobody wants to hire a cripple boy, so Jonathan just takes care of our livestock.” He tells Steve, propping his chin on his fist.

“How old is he?” He wonders.

“Fifteen.” He seems to grow distant then, thinking about something. “He wasn’t too fortunate with his illness, almost passed actually.” He says with a small frown.

“But he didn’t, at least.” Steve offers, William nods. “I want to go for a stroll through this floor of the mansion, accompany me, William?” He asks, the boy stands up.

“I thought you weren’t supposed to leave?” He asks nervously, Steve shrugs.

“I can’t be cooped up all day.” He says, turning his chair. “Plus, you’ll be helping the crippled boy.” He grins, William shakes his head and approaches the chair.

“You want me to push you?” He asks, Steve offers another careless shrug.

“If it makes you look busy, sure.” He allows, William moves behind him and starts to push. “Tell me about your mother.” He says as they exit, turning down the hallway.

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“Look, a robin!” William pulls himself up onto a window sill, kneeling on it as he leans against the frame. Steve can see the tree, and vaguely see a tiny bird perched on one of the branches.

“Yes, it is.” He agrees with a small smile.

“What in God’s name do you think you’re doing?” The voice startles them both, Frazier comes from behind Steve, grabbing William by the arm and yanking him down roughly. “This is not your house to lounge about in!” She says, grabbing the boy by his ear and tugging up, bringing the boy onto his toes.

“I’m sorry, ma’am!” He immediately cries, whimpering in pain and his hand on her wrist.

“I ought to box your ears for this insolence!” She barks at him.

“Have you lost your mind?” Steve snaps, the woman looks at him with confusion, William with wide eyes. “Let the boy go, now!” He demands, she does, in shock.

“You can’t talk to me like that!” She says in outrage, Steve tips his chin up at her.

“You’re but a servant, I can do as I like.” He says, voice a calm rage. “Don’t you dare lay a hand on this boy ever again, if I see it, I’ll make sure you’re fired!” He snaps, taking William by the arm and pulling him closer.

“Fired?” She says, eyes still wide but looking miffed now. “Right.”

She says faintly, eyes darting away in thought. “Of course, sir.” Her voice is barely audible.

“He’s showing me around, as far as I’m concerned, he’s doing his job just fine.” He reaches up and touches William’s chin, looking at his ear to make sure there was no actual damage. “Come then, introduce me to Michael, will you?” He asks, William nods his head, tears in his eyes.

“Of c-course, master Steven.” He says shakily, moving behind Steve’s chair and starting to push it. “Goodbye, ma’am.” He murmurs as they pass, the woman remains frozen in place as they head down the hallway.

“Servant or not, that’s outrageous.” He scoffs, leaning his cheek against his fist. “Treating a boy so foul for doing as he’s told.” He feels in a foul mood now, but he wants to cheer up William.

“Thank you, sir.” William mutters from behind him.

“William, consider it a pleasure of mine to put her in her place.” He grumbles.

“Will.” The boy says, Steve hums in idle confusion. “You may call me Will, if you like.” He offers.

“Of course, Will, you can call me Steve.” He reaches back, brushing the boy’s cheek with the back of his hand teasingly. “I’m sure that’ll

infuriate Frazier, won't it?" He smirks, looking back at the boy, who was smiling now.

"Most likely." He agrees with a soft giggle, Steve grins as he faces forward once again.

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He watches Michael and William race around together in his room a few days later, giggling and chattering as they played together. They were cute kids, and Steve was fond of them to say the least, despite Michael being a bit of a brat. He snorts when Michael topples onto the floor with Will, the both of them wrestling with loud laughter.

"What is going on in here?" Frazier steps in the room, hands on her hips and eyes narrowed as Will hurries to his feet.

"We were playing." Michael says, climbing to his feet slowly, but seeming unsure.

"Playing?" She looks to Steve with scrutiny, who arches a careless eyebrow at her, daring her to object.

"Yes ma'am, Steve asked for company." Will says, and the woman's eye twitches at the lack of respectful title used for Steve.

"Master Steven." She corrects, Will looks back at Steve with

uncertainty.

“I told him to address me as Steve, and as he said, I asked for company.” He pats the bed, Michael walks around and uses the bedframe as footing to get up on the mattress. Will hovers at the bedside, Steve leans over and grabs the little boy under the arms, pulling him up as well.

“This is not proper.” Frazier says, voice clipped.

“I am not proper.” Steve replies easily, then reaches up to ruffle Will’s hair. “I want to go outside today, boys will you accompany me on a stroll?” He asks, the boys quickly nod.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea.” Frazier says, mildly frazzled but trying to maintain her composure.

“I didn’t ask!” Steve quips, Michael ducks his head with a smile as Will jumps down to fetch the wheelchair. “However, I do request once we get to the stairs that someone help me down.” He says, waving his hand at the woman. “That’ll be all!” He says, dismissing her.

He watches her take in a deep breath, obviously fuming, before giving a curt nod and turning away. She storms out of the room and down the hall, barking orders at other servants as she goes. Steve starts to laugh, as does Michael, and even Will smiles, albeit nervously.

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“You live nearby, right, Will?” He asks as they stroll along the sidewalk along wilting gardens.

“Mm, yes.” He agrees, Steve focuses his eyes on Michael, who is waltzing ahead of them and occasionally glancing back to make sure they were still following.

“I’d like to meet your brother, if he’s available.” He explains, Will hums under his breath, sounding tired.

“He may not be there, he goes out on the moors sometimes.” He tells Steve, who reaches down to grab the handles of the wheels.

“I got it, boy, go ahead.” He says, pushing himself along now that they were away from the house.

Will moves out from behind him, walking alongside him and looking sheepish, possibly guilty. Steve pays him no mind, continues pushing himself and smelling the fresh air. It felt good to get outside, to do something for once instead of sitting in his room for hours. And although Will and Michael were good company, he’d rather like a friend his age.

“Michael, have you met Jonathan?” He calls out, the boy turns and stops, waiting for them to catch up.

“A few times, when he skulks about the gardens.” He says, Steve smirks and shoots a curious look to Will.

“Skulks?” He asks, Michael nods, getting on Steve’s other side.

“Will says Jonathan doesn’t like people too much, they make fun of him.” He says.

“They do.” Will says immediately.

“For being a cripple?” Steve questions, steering his chair around a dip in the gravel so as not to get caught.

“Sometimes, but he’s kind of strange too, like me.” He says, watching his feet as he walks.

“He walks funny.” Michael says without shame, Will shoots him a glare. “He does! He’s got a limp, and he doesn’t really use one of his arms.” He explains.

“It’s not as strong as his other one, he can’t help it.” Will says defensively, obviously protective of his older brother. “He keeps it in a sling sometimes, when it bothers him.” He tells Steve, who nods his head.

“He can talk to animals too.” Michael says suddenly, smiling, Will giggles.

“Animals?” Steve asks, the boys nod. “I have to say, I’m intrigued.” He says with a smirk.

“Jonathan’s curious about you too, I told him and mother about how you told Frazier off for grabbing me.” He tells Steve, who nods his head. “He said you must not be as much of a brat as Mike and Nancy.” He giggles, Steve barks a laugh.

“I’m not a brat!” Michael argues, Will shrugs, Steve stops pushing his chair along, tired. He stretches out his arms, then runs a hand through his long hair.

“I’m not quite sure I can make it today.” He admits grudgingly.

“I can push you!” Will says, and Michael eagerly nods.

“Me too!” He agrees, Steve shakes his head.

“No, it’s too far, I’m tired.” He says with a wave of his hand, offering an apologetic smile to the boys when they appear disappointed. “But we’ll have to come out more often, so I can build up my strength. I plan on meeting that brother of yours.” He says, reaching out to poke Will in the chest.

“I won’t tell him that, he’ll probably try to run away.” He shakes his head, and Steve finds himself more curious.

He’d have to meet this mysterious animal whisperer soon.

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One morning, when Will is busy, and Michael is off doing he doesn’t want to know what, Steve heads out into the gardens. The servants that help him down off the front steps give him wary looks, but leave when he dismisses them nonetheless. He rolls himself out into the gardens, with no real destination in mind, just trying to get some exercise.

It’s almost warm outside, probably one of the last days for it to be like that before winter really sets in. Steve is only dressed in a long-sleeve shirt and a pair of pants and shoes, his braces on over the garments. He rolls himself through the long hedges, listening to the birds and stopping to watch a nearby squirrel bury a nut before scurrying into a bush.

After a small break, he starts to move again, except this time he can hear quiet footsteps nearby. They’re behind him, soft, and if he were walking he might not have been able to distinguish them from his own. With every squeak of his chair, the footsteps carefully follow. After a minute or so, he turns a corner and then shifts his chair to face the corner, waiting.

He can hear the footsteps growing closer, hesitant and unsure. Then, a face peeks around the corner. The young man’s brown eyes widen

when he realizes he's been spotted, and he staggers back around the hedge. Steve pushes himself around the corner hurriedly, but the young man is gone, probably around one of the many large bushes. He sits there, listening to the stumbling footsteps rush away. They sound uneven, like someone with a limp, and he wonders if he just met Jonathan.

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Steve keeps his eyes out for the next few days, waiting for a glimpse of the elusive boy that he for some reason was so desperate to meet. He supposes he always liked a mystery, and this was as close to one as he could get. He saw James about, who insisted he call him Jim. He was gruff and moody, which Steve found a little funny, but he didn't seem to mind Steve anymore than anyone else.

Steve finds himself enjoying his time in the gardens, so of course something has to go wrong. He had left on his own this day, was doing so more often now. Frazier let him do as he like, and he didn't see her much at all now, which was preferred. He pushes himself through the gravel, along the tall hedges as usual. It had rained the night before, so the gravel was displaced and puddled had formed.

Steve miscalculates the distance between his wheel and a dip in the gravel. The chair rocks at the impact and Steve is caught off guard, toppling sideways and out of his chair. He tries to roll, his legs locked at such an angle that he can't do more than wriggle so his legs aren't tangled in the footrests.

He lays on his side, muddy water soaking into his side and gravel digging into his bare legs as he tries to regain his bearings. His hip hurts from the impact, and he hopes he hasn't further injured himself

in any way. He groans quietly, slowly pushing himself up and hissing as he notices a small cut near his knee where he had hit the ground.

"Damnit…" He sighs, running a shaking hand through his hair and dropping it into the muddy water on accident. He can feel frustrated tears forming in his eyes, he hated feeling helpless and vulnerable.

He would be stuck out here until Jim came by, or one of the other servants. He couldn't tip the chair over properly by himself, he had to put pressure on his legs to do so and that only further hurt him. He knew that he'd be scolded by Frazier when he got back, she might even ban him from the gardens. He grabs hold of the gravel, grunting quietly as he drags himself out of the water.

"Stupid, pathetic." He grumbles to himself, head snapping up when he hears something rustle. "H… Hello?" He calls out, wiping his damp hand on his shirt. "I need help!" He says, a little quieter, embarrassed.

A small figure steps out from behind a hedge, holding a stick in one hand. He recognizes the young man immediately, watching him creep along the edge of the bush as he approaches. He does indeed walk strangely, one leg stepping heavier than the other, the other turned outwards and barely touching the ground with every step.

He steps over to Steve, towering over him and glancing around hesitantly. Steve frowns up at him, the sun in his eyes making him squint. The young man is wearing a tattered jacket and patch covered pants, a couple of flowers sticking out of his jacket pocket. One of his arms is stuck into his pocket, the other holding the walking stick, which was really just a carved branch.

“You’re Jonathan, right?” He murmurs, the young man looks down at him with furrowed eyebrows. “Look, can you go get someone?” He asks, flinching when Jonathan drops his stick and it lands with a clatter on the gravel.

Jonathan steps over to the chair, leaning heavy on his left leg as he moves. He reaches down with his right arm, grunting as he grabs hold of the chair and pulls on it. It’s a bit of a struggle, and Steve wants to demand he go get someone else before he hurts himself, but he manages to get it upright.

“Thank you.” He says quietly, watching Jonathan stagger back from the chair.

Steve shuffles over to the chair, he was getting better at getting himself up in it now. So it only takes a minute or so to accomplish, which he’s rather proud of. His leg stings a little where he’s sluggishly bleeding, and his right leg is sore from the impact, but he’s otherwise fine. When he gets situated, he looks to Jonathan, who is leaning against a bush and watching him.

“Your brother’s my servant, he’s a good boy.” He says quietly, hesitant. Maybe Will and Mike forgot to mention the kid was dumb or something, because all he does is stare at Steve.

He watches Jonathan turn, limping a little more heavily over to the walking stick he’d dropped. He leans over to get it, attempting not to bend his legs, his fingers stretching to get to it. Steve grimaces at having to watch the ordeal, and wonders if people feel the same watching himself do ordinary things. He flinches when Jonathan’s

legs bend slightly, only for the bad one to collapse beneath him and send him to the ground with a grunt.

“Are you all right?” He pushes the chair forward, watching Jonathan sit up, getting his good leg underneath him. “Here, use my chair.” He pats the arm rest, Jonathan looks up at him with a wary glare. “Cripples have to stick together, you know.” He says jokingly, Jonathan huffs under his breath and grabs the chair arm, lifting himself to his feet.

“Thank you.” He says under his breath, Steve smirks. Jonathan gets steady on his feet, gripping his walking stick like a lifeline with the hand that wasn’t still stuck in his pocket.

“He speaks,” Steve holds out his hand. “Steven Harrington, but you can call me Steve.” He offers, simply because this was Will’s brother.

Jonathan pulls his hand out of his pocket, it looks frail and pale, not unlike the other one. This wrist looks smaller though, and Steve thinks about all the horror stories he’s heard about kids with polio. He shakes the young man’s hand gingerly, watching him for any signs of pain, but finding none.

“I’d offer to walk you home, but I can’t really walk.” He murmurs, and Jonathan lets out a quiet exhale that sounds like mild amusement. “It’s strange, I’ve heard you can talk to animals, but you don’t seem to be able to talk to people.” Jonathan glares down at him, scowling intensely.

“I don’t talk to rich brats.” He says quietly, Steve smirks.

“You’re talking to one right now.” He leans back in his chair, the movement makes his back cramp a little and he has to shift, grimacing. “I’d like to have you around sometime, although we’d probably have to meet outside because there are a lot of stairs.” He says, Jonathan stares at him warily.

“Why?” He asks, small eyes narrowed, and face pinched in an expression of confusion and annoyance.

“Because I want to spend time with you, and as a rich brat, I get what I want.” He says with a teasing smile, eyebrows rising up in mild surprise when Jonathan’s lips twitch up on one side before he ducks his head.

“When?” Jonathan questions, reaching up to muss his messy long hair.

“If it’s not raining, tomorrow morning?” He suggests, Jonathan turns his head to look up and down the aisles of hedges, as if looking for someone.

“Where?” He murmurs, Steve smirks.

“Are you only capable of one word sentences?” He asks, earning a frown from the other.

“Sometimes.” He says purposefully, which makes Steve laugh.

“All right, well tomorrow morning after breakfast at the front steps of the house.” He says with a jerk of his thumb back towards the house.

“Mm,” Jonathan’s fingers brush his lips, which looked dry and chapped. “Okay.” He agrees with a small nod, Steve smiles.

“You can invite your brother.” He says, wheeling his chair back and turning it, glancing back to watch Jonathan turn and disappear through some bushes without another word. “He’s strange, all right.” He mutters under his breath, continuing along the gravel, carefully this time.

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As promised, Jonathan is hovering at the edge of the gardens near the front steps when Steve is taken outside the next day. Will comes along with him, racing ahead as soon as he spots his brother. Jonathan steps forward out of the shadow of the hedge to hug Will.

Steve is set down at the base of the steps and he immediately sets to pushing himself forward towards the two. Jonathan still has his walking stick, the same coat and pants on but a different shirt. He’s met halfway by the other two, and he doesn’t hesitate to smile at Jonathan, attempting to set him at ease.

“There’s that joyous face!” He jokes at Jonathan’s stoic expression,

the other boy rolling his eyes in exasperation and slipping his bad hand into his pocket. “Where are we headed then, gentlemen?” He asks playfully.

“We could show him…” Will looks to Jonathan with a pointed expression, as if insinuating something silently. Jonathan meets his eyes and sighs, put upon, and then follows it up with a glance back at Steve.

“Show me what?” Steve questions curiously, earning a wicked grin from Will.

“The old garden, nobody goes back there, nobody even really knows about it.” He explains in a hurry, Jonathan grabbing his shoulder in a quiet attempt to scold him. “What? You let me show Mike, let’s show Steve!” He insists.

Will must see some form of agreement in Jonathan’s face, because without another shared word the young boy starts hurrying ahead. Jonathan looks at Steve with a small shrug, and then they slowly move to follow. Will disappears through the hedges at one point, leaving them alone together in a mildly awkward silence. He almost lets go of the wheels on his chair when Jonathan lets out a whistle, something carrying but gentle at the same time. The other boy stops so Steve stops as well, and he watches with a frown on his face as Jonathan whistles into the gray sky.

“What are you-…?” He doesn’t have time to finish before a small bird soars over one of the bushes and down towards them. It perches itself on Jonathan’s shoulder, hopping a few times before settling down close to the young man’s neck.

It’s a beautiful little sparrow, brown and speckled with a white belly. Jonathan reaches up with a finger and pets it gently, radiating content as he smiles gently.

“You want to pet her?” Jonathan asks, Steve quickly nods and the younger twitches his shoulder slightly. The bird hops its way down his arm and stops near his wrist, head twitching this way and that as it is lowered to Steve’s eye level. “Just use a finger.” He instructs, and Steve reaches up carefully.

“She’s soft.” He remarks as his finger rubs along the bird’s feathers gently. “You really are an animal whisperer.” He chuckles, Jonathan smirks in response and offers a small shrug.

“Animals are nicer than people.” He murmurs, and Steve can see the discomfort in his face shine through for a moment.

“Hurry up, you two!” They both turn, finding Will standing impatiently at the corner of a bush, waving at them.

“Shouldn’t keep him waiting, I guess.” Steve says, gripping his wheel chair handles and starting to push himself again.

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The garden door is hidden behind vines that have long overgrown

their original place. However, it's obvious that they have been removed enough from the panel of the door as to allow easier access. Jonathan pushes the door open and Will tips Steve's chair back as gently as possible to lift it onto the raised hill of the barrier between the hedge and the walkway.

Once he's through the door, he's met with a mass of yellows and oranges, leaves reaching their end stage as the fall gives way into winter. Yet, he still finds it beautiful, there's something about it that makes him stare in wide-eyed marvel. He wonders how beautiful it might look in spring, when everything begins to bloom.

"Jonathan tends to it, Mike and I help." Will explains, walking down a cobblestone path ahead of them.

"It's beautiful." Steve murmurs, having nothing else that he can manage to say. He turns to look at Jonathan, who has that content look on his face again as he brushes his fingers over a small tree's branch.

"It is." He agrees, looking to Steve with a sincere smile that has him returning it quickly.

Author's Note:

> (I'm totally thinking about continuing this, although anything added to it wouldn't be long. Happy Day 1 of Stonathan Week!)